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**Testimony of
Michelle Noehren
Legislative Assistant for the
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
March 13, 2006
Before the
Government, Administration and Elections Committee**

In Support of: HB 5610, AAC Revisions to the Comprehensive Campaign Finance Laws

Good morning Sen. DeFronzo, Rep. Caruso and members of the committee. My name is Michelle Noehren and I am the Legislative Assistant for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of H.B. 5610, AAC Revisions to the Comprehensive Campaign Finance Laws. We support this proposed bill that would remove the "non-severability" clause in the new law because that clause unreasonably jeopardizes implementation of any of the historic reforms enacted last year.

The PCSW is dedicated to the advancement of women in public office and has long fought to close the gender gap in political involvement. At the end of 2005, under the direction of this committee and Chairpersons Senator DeFronzo and Representative Caruso, the legislature passed the most comprehensive campaign finance bill in the country. We applaud this victory and thank the members of the GAE committee in particular for your attention to this important issue.

The recent passage of publicly funded elections will encourage higher numbers of women to run for office. According to a report released last year titled: The Highest Glass Ceiling, Breaking Down Barriers and Creating Equal Opportunity Elections, similar laws in Maine and Arizona continue to show that the availability of public funds has increased the number of women who ran for public office.

In particular, in 1998, 105 women ran for legislative office in Maine. Then, in 2002, 116 women ran for office. *Therefore, there was an increase of 10 percent.* Similar results followed in Arizona: In 1998, 51 women ran for office in Arizona and in 2002, 65 women ran for legislative office. *Therefore, there was an increase of over 27 percent*¹

Not only are more women running for office in these states but more women are using public financing compared to men. In addition, surveys conducted in Maine and Arizona has found that the availability of public funds was a very important factor in women's decisions to run for office². In fact, in 2002, a study done by the Money & Politics Implementation Project found that 87 % of women who ran for office in Arizona said they would not have run without the availability of public financing³.

Furthermore, fairness in the election process has resulted in a higher number of women being elected to office in Arizona. The number of women elected to the Arizona legislature rose from 26.7% in 2002 to 33.3% in 2004. It is clear that the availability of public funds has encouraged more women to run for office.

Connecticut is now braced to begin our own system of publicly funded elections. We have the opportunity to truly begin to close the gender gap in politics by removing one of the largest barriers women face when contemplating a run for office: the need for large sums of money to run a campaign.

However, there is one section of the Campaign Finance bill that has the ability to end this important move forward under our new system of elections. The non-severability clause would repeal the entire campaign finance law if someone were to bring the law to court and a judge were to stop the flow of public money for 72 hours. Back in November, Connecticut took a historic step forward by choosing to enact new campaign finance laws. To leave the non-severability clause intact threatens the progress towards fairness in our election process which was the original intent of this very important bill.

The PCSW urges your support for this bill.

¹ The Highest Glass Ceiling; Breaking Down Barriers and Creating Equal Opportunity Elections, 2005

² Women Speak Out About Clean Elections, Northeast Action 2005

³ Breslow, M, Groat, J, Saba P. 2002. Revitalizing Democracy: Clean Election Reform Shows the Way Forward

